

EXHIBIT NO. 7DATE 3-13-09BILL NO. HB 390

*Mr. Chairman*

Thank you Senator Balyeat and members of the committee for hearing my testimony about the freedom of birth choice. My name is Barbie Eriksson and my family chose a non-hospital birth for a variety of reasons. I'm here to ask you to vote Yes on House Bill 390.

I have been a nanny for 17 years and had the experience of hearing many families birth stories. I have also been present for several births, both hospital and home, before the births of my own children. I was lucky enough to know a few women who had experienced birth with the care of a midwife. I found their experiences different from everything I had ever imagined about birth. I knew I wanted look into options other than a hospital birth when I had my own children.

When I became pregnant with my first child I was working as a nanny for an infant and family who had experienced an extremely traumatic birth experience with the mother, Karen Sclafani, dying after birth. She had been under the care of a midwife and had also seen physicians during her pregnancy. After looking at all of our options and asking a lot of questions, my husband and I decided to have a non-hospital birth with Mikelanne Caywood-Baerg, the midwife who had cared for Karen with amazing skill and compassion. We did a lot of research about the safety of a non-medical birth and about the events surrounding Karen's death and felt completely confident in our decision. We were extremely pleased with the maternity and birth care we received. There have been people in Bozeman and the medical community who have attempted to use Karen's story as an example of the dangers of midwives, which has been an injustice to both Karen's memory and her family. I understand that hospitals will lose money if women start deciding to choose non-medical birth options, but trying to scare people with inaccurate stories is not acceptable or responsible. I felt I needed to be here today to share my story and represent the situation accurately.

The birth of my children will always be the two most amazing days of my life. I was allowed to birth without drugs, bright lights, or machines. I did not want different doctors and nurses coming in and out. I didn't feel I could have the kind of birth I wanted in a hospital setting. I was allowed to have control in the way I was giving birth, surrounded by a few people in a safe and warm environment. My experience was calm and amazingly peaceful, quietly letting my children come into the world. I know other women who are more comfortable in a hospital setting and I am glad that experience is available for them. These two ways of experiencing birth are fundamentally very different. Having the choice of a non-medical birth is what midwives and birthing centers offer families.

This bill is about giving people a choice in one of the most important experiences of their lives, the birth of their child. Luckily my family was able to afford to pay for the birth we knew was right for our family. Other families are not so lucky and it makes no sense why they shouldn't have the right to choose. Some insurance companies won't pay unless a birth happens in a licensed facility. If a facility meets State requirements for safety codes and guidelines, it should be able to obtain a license. Montana law allows midwives to operate independently, and they provide a valuable service to families in our communities. I feel the midwife experience of birth centers needs to be an option for all families who are interested, not just those who can afford it.

Thank you again for hearing my testimony. Please allow people a choice in the birth of their children by voting Yes on House Bill 390.

*The care I received was professional and second to none.*